

Monsters Are Real by CDsis

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Summary: ...And they don't just come from the Upside Down... / First chapter is more SPN than ST. Also, I wanna add that this is M for mainly because of incessant use of the F word and maybe some bad flirting.

1. Chapter 1

Alice O'Conner, the only child of Caitlin O'Conner and Dan Genovesi.

The product of a Hunter and Mythology Fanatic that decided to make a career out of his obsession.

Born in New Orleans, where her family stayed until she was four years old. But then her dad got a job at a University up in Boston and they had to move. Boston wasn't so bad at first. At least, not until her mother realized it was full of the things she used to hunt on a regular basis.

Those 'things' being *monsters*.

Monsters that she went out to find most nights. Always came home covered in cuts and bruises, looking worn out and pissed off until she saw her daughter and gave her a sad smile. When asked, she would tell the little girl that she was keeping strangers safe and that she wasn't as hurt as she looked.

Dan didn't believe her excuses as easily as their daughter, but they never fought over it and he never said as much. Even when he was so obviously bothered by her injuries.

Alice always felt so proud when her mom came home looking like that because she knew it meant the woman saved someone from something *evil*, from a *monster*.

Apparently, the first monster her mother killed had been a Banshee. It was a hard job. Left her slightly traumatized and maybe gave her a slight case of tinnitus, but it also made her stronger, tougher, and maybe even a little smarter. That was back in Ireland, though. She came to America with her parents when one of them pissed off some seriously *bad* people back home. She still doesn't know which of her family members was stupid enough to do something that made them run away to another country.

Her father had always been interested in legends and folklore,

studied it in his free time and became a professor on it at a young age. He taught himself Latin to make his life easier and went on a few archaeological digs to find magic-y shit, but always came up empty handed, much to his immense disappointment.

The two met when her mother needed something translated from Latin to something remotely understandable. He was the only person willing to help her. And of course, the stuff he read peaked his curiosity, so he followed her after handing over the translations.

What he saw that night...

Well, it sealed the deal.

He was in love.

They got married after a year together, and had Alice about year and a bit after that.

Her dad died when Alice was around eight years old, and her mom basically snapped from the shock of it. Alice only has vague memories of that night, but she knows *for sure* that it was done by something she couldn't see. Something that growled and tore her dad open and left long trails of claw marks in the tiles of the kitchen floor.

The two remaining members of their small family became a mother/daughter Hunting team, traveling around the country, moving from city to city, state to state, every couple weeks. Never somewhere for more than two months. Alice researched the monsters for her mother and made anything special her mother might need. Her mother did the actual *hunting* and *killing*, leaving her daughter to fend for herself in either a motel room or at a good friend's place.

She used to transfer schools every few weeks because they 'moved' so often, and after a while Alice started to hate the time school wasted. She could be doing something useful; something that could help her mom *not get killed*! Soon enough, she stopped bothering with school. Skipped a lot until a teacher pulled her mom aside for a chat after school. When they got back to the motel that night she told her mom school was stupid and useless, and the woman agreed.

You don't exactly need *Algebra* or *Home Ec* to hunt and kill a Vampire or Demon, after all.

Two years of no school, no weird looks for being the new girl, no wondering where the Hell her mom was at all times, no worrying herself sick about her mother's well-being. Just regular amounts of worry, none of that flip-flopping stomach shit.

Even after everything she'd been through and a few years of training that left her bruised and sore all over, courtesy of Mother Dearest and her *fists*, Alice never would have guessed there would come a day when she had to finish a job for her mother.

Finish it *with* her, maybe.

Finish it *for* her, never.

Yet there she was, in front of some poor California boy her age, attempting to purge his poor battered body of a Demon that amplified his own rage so much that he acted like a wild animal while possessed. Her mother was positive the creature was a Specter or Evil Spirit, but Alice thought it was actually a Demon that was feeding off the boy's anger and hatred; using all of those bad emotions to its advantage. To make it easier to get into the boy's vessel.

She uses every trick in the book. Spends two days on the exorcism. Feeds him and helps him drink some water so he won't die when the Demon finally smokes out.

But, see, the thing is:

Her mother never properly trained her for *this*; for the *Getting Something Evil Out of a Human* part of their job. And because of that, at the beginning of day three Alice starts panicking. She's tired and worried and pissed off and doesn't want to go overboard, but also wants to get the stupid thing *out of the poor boy already!* She even apologizes to him, hoping he can hear her past the creature that is controlling him, every time she has to get rough.

The monster in the human's body laughs at her, taunts her, tells her the boy 'checked out' ages ago.

"He was broken, he *is* broken, so he left."

"And *you* can *shut the hell up*."

It laughed and she apologized to the boy trapped inside his own body before decking said body across the face; her left fist connecting with his right cheek. The skin of her knuckles split open, as did the skin along his cheek bone. Their blood mixed and dripped slowly down their skin in weird trails that left Alice feeling sick and the Demon laughing like the jackass it was.

By the end of night three, she had won and the deranged Demon -"*Ha, take that Ma!*"- was gone. Out. Left in a flash of orange light back to the fiery pit it belonged in. The boy who owned the body had yet to wake up, but he had a pulse so she wasn't too concerned.

She took the chance to go through his pockets, suddenly very curious about him and too tired to feel bad for snooping. She found his wallet and the student ID thing it contained with his name on it. She memorized his name quickly before going through the rest of the wallet.

A picture of a blonde woman and a younger version of the boy beside her was the only interesting thing in there, tucked carefully into the billfold. It was old, crinkled around the edges, obviously folded and unfolded multiple times what with the creases that divided the photo into four squares. It was also obviously *precious*, much like the few pictures she kept of her dad, so she carefully tucked it back into his wallet along with his ID thingy, then put the wallet back in his pocket.

He groaned, then. Filled with pain and exhaustion, but didn't wake up. Just shifted uncomfortably on the floor of the motel room. He was too heavy for her to move, even with all the strength training she'd done, so she laid him out on the floor when the Demon fucked off. And she was too exhausted to get up to grab pillows off the beds. Instead she shifted closer to him, lifted his head up slightly, and moved her thigh under him. Her legs were sort of thick, enough so to

make a decent pillow, anyway.

She looked down at him, bloody and bruised because she was too tired to clean him up after the exorcism, and ran her fingers through his mess of blonde curls. *A fuckin' mullet*, she mused when she caught a tangle. She smoothed it out gently and then got back to playing with his *fuckin' mullet*.

That will never *not* be funny.

She drifted off leaning against the foot of the motel bed with her hand still in his hair.

When he woke up the next morning things were only a little awkward, as he had no idea how he got to the motel. Actually, he had only the vaguest of memories spanning over the last week or so. She called him by his name at some point, wanted to get his attention. Totally forgot that she went through his stuff to get it until after it came out of her mouth. He gave her a weird look so she shot into an explanation in hopes it wouldn't set him off.

"I'm sorry! I went through your wallet to get your name an-"

"I use *Billy*, not *Will*."

"Oh. So... you aren't mad?"

He shrugged, continued washing the blood off his face so she could apply some first-aid crap like butterfly stitches and antiseptic.

So, yeah, not mad. Just wanted to correct her.

To lift some of the tension she called him all sorts of variations of Billy. From *Billiam* to *Billy Boy* to fucking *Billabong*, because why the fuck not? It seemed to distract him from the pain of the injuries *she caused*, so she did it with a smile. It made her feel like less of an asshole. Along with the stupid nicknames they talked about mundane shit, like music and bands and TV because they were actively avoiding the topic of *what the hell happened to him*.

But then it came to *that* and she had to tell him. She *had to*. She

couldn't just tell him to forget about it. He needed to know so he could take some precautions. Demons sometimes liked to use a previously possessed vessel and that's what Billy was to them now.

She said just that and he gaped at her for a moment before he seemed to remember something fucked up that the Demon used his body for, and he got *so mad*. Fists clenched so tightly that his knuckles turned white. Grinding teeth as he worked his jaw. Eyes that went dark and looked right past her as he processed the new info.

She sat next to him, shoulder to shoulder. The contact pulled him out of his own head and she told him how to keep the Demons away. Salt and circles and a charm that she gently placed in his palm after she told him to hold his hand out.

She showed him her own and chirped about them *matching*, then watched as he slowly broke into a fit of laughter. It was such childish way to talk about something that would keep actual *Demons* out of his insides, and that was what made it so fucking funny.

She asks him to stay an extra night because her mom will be out for two more night and she doesn't want to be alone.

This was at a time when Billy Hargrove could be anything besides a raging asshole, so he agrees. Also, he really wanted another night away from his dick of a dad. They go out to grab some fast food, then go back to the motel to eat and watch TV shows with shitty reception side by side on one of the beds until they both pass the Hell out.

Even after everything that went down Billy, the absolute *idiot* that he apparently is, was more worried about what his dad would do to him for being gone so long, rather than the bruises, burns, and cuts scattered across his skin.

"That's normal." He'd told her with a lazy shrug, "And knowing my luck, I'll get more of 'em when I get back."

"Want me to scare your dad for ya? I'm pretty good with a gun, y'know."

He smiled at her, all white teeth and amusement and maybe a little bit of sadness, too.

She mirrored it, but with less teeth.

He declined the offer of a shotgun in his father's face. Said it would just make things worse once she left because *she's a girl and having a girl defend him is pathetic* in the old dickbag's shitty opinion.

They split up that night, after she warned him about what telling other people would do. *Padded walls and colourful pills await those who tell their story*, she told him in a well-practiced imitation of her mother's accent. He laughed at her and gave her a tired smile that she returned.

They hugged before going their separate ways, Alice whispering *be careful* into his ear as she slowly pulled away.

She didn't miss the way Billy tensed up when she wrapped her arms around him.

He didn't miss the lonely look in Alice's eyes when they backed away from each other.

Billy went home to a hard, backhanded smack across the face that knocks him to the ground and opens one of his butterfly stitches, followed by some snarled insults from his dad.

Alice went back to an empty motel room with blood in the carpet that she needed to scrub out and an empty feeling in her chest that could only be there because of the absence of her new friend.

Could she even call Billy her 'friend' when they had only spent *one* day together with him un-possessed?

After a particularly nasty fight with her mother back at the motel she ran off. Wandered down random streets, curling and uncurling her fingers around the butterfly knife in the pocket of her hoodie. She didn't like big cities even though she'd lived both New Orleans and Boston for a while each. There are always packs of shitty people roaming the streets at night, and crimes being committed

everywhere, and she feels danger behind her no matter where she goes.

She ran into Billy the morning after she ran away. He was standing out in front of his school with a couple other boys, probably his friends, when she saw his familiar head of blonde curls and grinned to herself.

She hadn't known he lived in the area she wandered into, but she was happy she had found him and he seemed happy to see her as well. The boys he was with, two sketchy looking kids around their age, hooted and hollered at them when they ran to each other. Teased him the way friends do about being so excited about seeing a girl, and leered at her until she brought out the knife she had been gripping in her pocket.

They watched how expertly she flipped the weapon around until it was open and, thankfully, stopped being creeps.

Alice and Billy ended up spending a full week together after that.

He would sneak her into his room through his window late at night so she had somewhere to sleep. Every night was stretched out as far as it could go, the teens staying up into the wee hours of the morning; just talking quietly until one or both of them passed out.

On day one of their weird, secret cohabitation she started calling him all those stupid versions of his name again.

He took to calling her *Wonderland* in retaliation. When she made a face he blushed a bit. *Like the place Alice goes to in that book*, he explained. It made her grin. And when he found out her mother was from Ireland he started calling her *Lucky Charms*. He'd grin because she would pretend to get offended, just like he did every time she called him something stupid. That one was saved for when he wanted to get her attention though.

Mostly he just called her *Al*. It was short and boyish and simple. She liked it.

On day two she taught him how to use a gun. She thought he should know how to shoot Neil if the bastard ever went too far, and he agreed.

In exchange he taught her how to 'act' because he thought she needed to know how to hide things from people with just a *look*. Figured he should help her practice her 'Poker Face'.

She wasn't very thrilled to learn that he was so good at 'acting'. *Acting* like he's okay or happy or not completely messed up, hiding all the bad shit behind a mask of *I'm fine, I'm tough*. She had never been very good at hiding her bullshit, but he was a master at it.

They spent that night in a park drinking cheap beer they bribed some homeless guy to get them and shooting the shit. Ranting about shitty people and sometimes their own parents. It was like therapy without judgement or a stupid *bill*.

Day three was spent skipping school.

It was a Monday morning, and when they went back to Billy's house for his school shit Neil caught him. Knocked him around so bad that Alice felt like she *had to* intervene. Left herself no other choice.

She busted down the front door of the little home and threatened Neil with a crowbar she'd picked up the night before. Smashed it against the kitchen counter to get his attention, then marched over and stuck it in his face, waving it around threateningly. She waited until Billy had slid behind her on floor, then launched into Protective Mode, knowing well enough that Billy would be pissed at her for it later on.

But Billy's feelings didn't really matter to her in *that moment*.

"I've fucked up worse than you, asshole! You'd be a piece of Goddamn cake compared to the monsters I've dealt with over the years! I know where you live, fuckin' remember that."

Her voice got low and dark at the end, that's what Billy will always

remember best about that morning.

She sounded just as dangerous as Neil, in that sentence. Her voice echoed what he usually sounded like while he was berating Billy, sneering as he kicked his own son in the ribs or back. But she used that tone against the *bad guy*, and not him.

She helped Billy up then, grabbed him by the arm and hauled him up to his feet, then pulled him backwards with her; towards the door she'd basically kicked in. They turned around and sprinted when they made it outside and Alice shouted over her shoulder at the fucker.

"Don't make me hafta come back here!"

They ran to a motel that night; one far away the motel they shared after his *exorcism*.

That was still weird to think about, and he knew it always would be.

Alice used a fake credit card to pay for the room. Lied about *their mom* being right behind them when the guy behind the counter questioned them about being alone together in a parental tone. The old bastard didn't believe her, so she pulled out some bills and raised an eyebrow at him. A silent bribe. He accepted it and asked if they wanted a double or a single. Double rooms were more expensive and Alice didn't want to over use the fake card, so she asked for a single.

He handed her a key and said something like *be safe* as they left.

They went to the corner store before getting settled in, had to get some stuff for the new cut on his mostly healed face. More butterfly stitches and antiseptic. After patching him up *yet again* she told him to keep it all in his bag because she knew he would need them again eventually.

Once Billy was all stitched back together he tried to make himself look more than pissed, then started on his halfhearted attempt to scold Alice for getting in Neil's face.

To end it he sighed, "I have to go back there, y'know..."

"Not tonight." She replied coolly.

"But at some point."

"I'll give you a gun."

He had no response for that. He just laughed.

Days four and five blended together. Both were spent in the motel room that was paid for with a fake credit card Billy still hadn't asked about. The two teens went out once or twice to get some food and cheap beer, then they would go back to the room and do something boring but time-consuming while they ate and drank.

They played their own version *Twenty Questions* at some point.

Billy asked about her 'job' and her mom and dumb, simple stuff.

Alice asked about his dad and California and what having friends was like.

"You should know, Wonderland. *We're* friends. Always will be."

"Why? 'Cause I got that Demon outta ya?" She asked, feeling downright self-loathing in that moment.

"Nah." He paused, shrugged, looked her in the eye. "Okay, maybe a little. But mostly 'cause you're fun. Y'ain't fuckin' annoying like most girls, or boring like almost everyone I know, and we like the same shit."

Music, TV, people, she reminded herself.

"And you *care*. Which is, like, *nice*, I guess." He trailed off into a mumble at the end, his hand rubbing nervously at the back of his neck.

He wouldn't look at her, cheeks flushed just a tiny bit.

She flushed too. "You're the first friend I've had since I was six." She admitted.

"You're my first, uh, *girl* friend. *Ever*, I think."

They grinned at each other then. Chugged a few more beers. Passed out side by side on the only bed in the room.

Day six, Billy decided he had to go home.

"Gotta take my punishment like a man, I guess."

She protested, but he insisted.

He won the argument, but she went with him. Slipped in through his bedroom window with her trusty, rusty crowbar in hand. Ready to smash it against Neil's ugly nose if need be.

Billy came in through the front door expecting to get hit. Instead he found his dad sitting at the kitchen counter with a woman. The freaky part of the whole thing wasn't that there was a woman in the house, but that Neil was being kind of... *nice*.

He seemed concerned. Even asked Billy where he'd been and if he was okay, but looked him over with eyes that didn't match his words. They said something more along the lines of *keep your trap shut*. And when the bastard asked him where the new cut on his face came from, Billy *knew* it was an act.

An act his old man was putting on for his new *girlfriend*.

He only played along so Neil would let him go to his room, and once he was there he locked the door behind him with a heavy sigh.

Alice could tell something was up right away, went straight for the tape player on his nightstand and picked out a random tape of his, then popped it in. She hit fast forward and waited for a few seconds before she hit play. The song ended up being "Black Dog". They played it as quietly as possible so Neil wouldn't come in to flip out on Billy.

She thought the music would be a good distraction, and she was right. Another good distraction was the moment she laid her head against his chest and wrapped an arm around his waist.

He was shocked stiff, staring down at her with wide eyes. When he

tried to say something she sweetly said *shut your douche nozzle*. He didn't look at all upset as he obeyed the order. Chuckled at her weird choice of words and the tone she said them in.

They fell asleep a while later, just like that, while *Kansas* quietly sang "Carry On My Wayward Son".

Day seven, the last day, sucked the most.

Not during the actual day which was great! They hung out in Billy's room until late, did nothing but talk and listen to music.

At some point Alice popped out through the window to run down to the store for snacks. Billy said his dad would notice food missing because the guy was an ass, but he was an *observant* ass. If she wanted to eat, she would have to go get some food. She had no problem with that. Bought enough to leave some behind for whenever Billy needed it, actually.

But Alice knew that eventually she would have to go back to her mother. Her vacation with Billy was nice and she liked having a friend, but she had a job to do and her mom had probably been freaking out the entire time she was gone.

She kissed him goodbye this time, the hug that followed only an afterthought.

He gave her his phone number for whenever and whatever, but when she finally found the time to call him nobody picked up.

And thanks to her mother they never went back to California.

Sometimes, Alice catches herself wondering how Billy is doing. Asks herself if it's possible that Neil killed him, or if the stress of everything caused him to snap and do something stupidly reckless.

Billy has a bit of darkness in him that grows with all of the bad shit he goes through everyday. It's what lured in the Demon that possessed him, and it's one of the things she sort of liked and still likes about him.

Because she has a bit of growing darkness, too.

They *match*, almost like two twisted puzzle pieces made of anger and hate and some other deep down issues the wouldn't even discuss with each other. Or like the charm she always wears and the other one that she gave him that night. It's always been strangely comforting to know all of that that, she thinks, and she's positive nobody else will ever match her the way he did.

She thinks about this shit a lot while in the hospital, two years later, after basically getting ripped apart in the middle by a Werewolf's claws in Connecticut. The morphine makes her feel nostalgic. The bed is so cold she starts wishing someone would cuddle with her to warm her up. The bandages are painfully tight and itchy.

She cries for the first time in a long time.

I might do more, I might not.

Tell me what you want and I may just comply.

2. Chapter 2

Billy is a sad, broken, fucked up little boy and he needs a fuckin' hug, okay?

I just love him so much!

On that note...

A little bit of Billy's life after Alice left Cali.

When Susan brought Max over for the first time, Billy froze.

It was too shocking.

She was this twig of a little girl, with long red hair and big shiny eyes that stared at him like he was the most confusing thing in the whole world.

Looking at her brought him back to that week he spent with a girl he barely knew. A girl with the hair just like Max's. A girl who saved his life and threatened Neil for hurting him and didn't fuck off the second she saw how screwed up he was.

A girl who was, in a really strange way, a little like himself.

She didn't have an asshole dad who liked to kick the crap out of her and hurl insults at her, but she *did* have an overbearing mother who liked to give her *hands on* fighting lessons. And they both had dead parent issues on top of everything else.

So in that moment, as the little redhead stared up at him with her big eyes, he couldn't help but miss *that girl* even more than he already had been since she left.

Suddenly, he caught himself wondering if she had gotten mauled by something since he last saw her. Or eaten. Or if some Demon got to her. Maybe it happened the same way one of them got him, or maybe in a more *blood and guts* kind of way. The thoughts weren't great. In fact, they made him sick to his stomach, but they were *there* and he

couldn't *not* think them. They were just too loud to ignore.

(There was also *fire* and *screaming* and *pain*, stillissometimes, but that was always pushed to the very back of his head when he thought about *her*.)

For a long time he couldn't look at Max without feeling sort of lost, and all because of her *fucking hair*.

It made him feel pathetic.

But even with all of that going on, they got along fairly well. After the initial shock of how similar Max looked to Alice tapered off, anyway. It took a couple weeks to be honest, but Billy worked through it, and soon enough they bonded until their relationship was almost perfect. They weren't ever going to see eye-to-eye, and they were never going to be as close as real siblings would, but they were *close enough*. There were disagreements once in a while, usually small or about something stupid, but mostly they were more than happy to hang out together. Anything to be away while their parents were being all couple-y and shit.

(He still can't look at her hair without feeling kind of lonely, just a tiny bit, in a *chest pain* sorta way. Not so much nowadays, but back then it was pretty bad.)

He willingly took her out with him, showed her his favourite places to chill out at, entertained her any way he could. They went to the beach, the arcade, the movies. Anywhere the little shit wanted to go, he took her. Neil even gave him the money for it which was probably just another way to try to impress Susan, but Billy wasn't going to complain about it.

Billy bought Max her first skateboard when they were out one Saturday because she wouldn't stop staring at it in the shop window. Her eyes went impossibly wide when he dragged her into the shop, and her mouth dropped open when he handed the paid-for board over to her. She even fucking *hugged* him for it.

That shit was weird.

He used to know some people who were pretty good with the sketchy-looking board on wheels, so he does a pretty okay job teaching her how to ride it. She caught on quick enough and soon she was zooming around on it without his help.

But Max and Susan always have to go back to their own home, so Billy ends up alone with his asshole of a dad at the end of the day every *Goddamn* time they come over.

Neither of the Mayfield girls ever asked him where he kept getting his bruises.

(They still don't ask, but he knows they know.)

It takes a year after he meets Max and Susan for them to suddenly *move in*.

Both of the girls seemed excited, and Billy could see the ring on Susan's finger; all shiny with a diamond on it. That means Neil and Susan had gotten *engaged* and Billy hadn't been told, which felt fan-fucking-tastic, but what else should Billy have expected from the asshole he once called *dad*, but now called *Sir*.

(Or *Neil* when the man wasn't around to hear it.)

He was so bitter about being left out of the loop, about not being told *at all*, that he sulked in his room like a little fucking kid the entire night.

At some point that same night Max came to his room, all bouncy and excited, gushing about Billy becoming her big brother soon. Her wide grin and hyper movements got him to grin right back at her. Ever since they started getting along she'd always been able to lift his mood a bit when he was down and he liked that about her.

Later, a small part of Billy prayed Neil would give him a bit of a break with the two new additions to their family around.

He would be wrong, of course, because when was Neil/Sir/Dad *ever* a decent human being towards his own son?

(Never. Not once. Not since he was still unable to speak or walk on his own, he assumes, if he *ever* had been in the first place.)

There were still backhanded smacks across the face, kicks to the ribs if he hit the floor, insults only ever directed at Billy. Cruel names that were only thrown around when Susan and Max weren't around.

Neil didn't want to scare away the Mayfield girls (one of them soon-to-be *Hargrove*), after all.

Billy always knew he wasn't a naturally violent person. With how gentle his mom was and how much time she spent with him, Billy would have never been as cruel as Neil if his mom hadn't died.

Or at least, he never *thought* he was violent. He never enjoyed hurting people or pushing them around, because he wasn't a *bully* (he wasn't *Neil*). He was just a *very angry kid* because he had a lot to be angry about, but nowhere to dish out that anger. He'd never once considered venting his aggression on other people (his mom would've been disappointed if he did).

And it would be *wrong*.

But after that *Demon*...

Well, it unlocked a fairly *dark* part of young Billy Hargrove.

A dark part of him that wanted other people to hurt just as badly as he did, all the time. He wanted others to feel what he felt, and whatever that Demon unlocked made it happen. He used to be really good at keeping his anger bottled up for later. Later, when he would punch something inanimate until his fists ached and bled and (just once) *broke*.

But after the Demon he would just... *let loose*.

He started fighting. He would hit someone just for looking at him wrong, or because they bumped his shoulder in the hall by accident. He knew it wasn't right but he did it anyways because he was *hurting* and *pissed* and *alone*.

His dad had never been a *dad*, his mom was dead, his friends had fucked off long before the fighting started, and Alice was *gone*.

So he hit and kicked and punched, rag-dolled people across rooms and hallways whether they deserved it or not, tossed around insults the same way Neil did. He hurt other people because it was the only way to make himself feel better.

In the moment, anyways.

Afterwards, he would go home and feel like absolute *shit* for what he did, but would never admit it to anyone. He would sit and think and regret, wondering what his mom would say if she found out. Or what Alice might think if she knew. He was acting the way she'd described the Demon did, in his body.

That thought made him sick. That he was like a mix of Neil and an unholy creature that enjoyed making people suffer.

(In retrospect, *Neil Hargrove* and *Demons* seem to have a lot in common. Both of them enjoy other's suffering, and making those people suffer with their bare hands rather than a weapon. They screw people up, mentally or physically or *both*, until the victim snaps and does the same to someone else (or dies). It's all one big, violent and unnecessary cycle of *pain* and *hate*.)

The only upside to the violence was that it made him look a little more tough in his dad's eyes, and that kept him off Billy's back for a little bit. Got him to ease up on kicking the crap out of Billy sometimes. And if he *won*, he sometimes got a pat on the back. He would still get a couple smacks for causing trouble, but *fighting* boys instead of *fucking* them made his dad happy(ish).

There were a few nights after fights where he would wonder if *she* would be pissed at him for doing this shit, or if she would feel proud.

Would she get mad at him for being such a prick?

Would she be just as big of one as he was?

No, he would tell himself after he'd spent a few minutes thinking it over. No, *she would be like the angel on his shoulder*.

She would have been the angel on one shoulder that kicked the devil off the other, then whispered in both of his ears to do the right thing, to be better, to not hurt people just because he was hurting.

God, he missed her.

And that felt weird because he barely knew her. Sure, they spent a week together. They did whatever they wanted, went wherever they wanted, drank and smoked and talked about the shittier aspects of their lives. She showed him the scars from monsters that got too close, he showed her the scars from his dad being a shitty human being.

(They may have bonded over some stuff, but it wasn't like they knew each other enough to fucking *miss* each other, right?)

He blocks out the feeling, and any feelings after that revolving around *her*. He really didn't need *that* on top of all his *feelings* about the unfair mess that is *his life* as of late.

Most of the time, Billy was stressed and tired and so fucking done.

(Still *is*, kinda.)

He snuck out a lot, hung around with not-so-great people, smoked and drank a lot, and slept around like he got paid for it.

(Which he *did not*, thank you very much.)

There weren't too many spats with his dad, and that was almost worse than their old routine. He kept waiting for the angry asshole to beat his face in for something fucking *stupid*, like a dirty plate or not cleaning his room 'properly', but it didn't happen the way he basically wanted it to. It came with fairly gentle back hands and growled threats.

He started a fight one night just to feel normal again.

Later, when he went to bed with bruises darkening across his face and chest, all he felt was angry, just like always.

This time, though, it was directed purely at himself.

Things were good for a while. About two years, give or take a couple months.

He started to have nightmares at some point. They were usually a mix of Neil's 'discipline' and what he watched that Demon use his body for. Sometimes, though, *she* suddenly popped up and then she gets eaten by some ungodly creature right in front of him.

Neil toned down the violence significantly, only gave Billy a few smacks and insults here and there. Almost always for being a little shit as usual (but sometimes just because Billy was there when he was angry). But what kid isn't a little shit, right? Talk back to *any* authority figure, starts fights in school, act like a total brat. All of it gets you a quick smack as punishment.

That was how Billy saw it, anyway.

But then he got reckless, got stupid, went full-blown *mental*, and brought someone home with him that he *shouldn't have*.

See, Billy has always liked people in general. Not in a "*Let's be friends!*" way, but in a "*If you have a nice face then I'll totally swap spit with you.*" way. Boy or Girl, tall or short, curvy or twig-like. He's never given a shit as long as he got to be in control of whatever they were doing together.

(It was one of the many things *she* agreed with him on.)

Whereas Neil Hargrove found just the thought of a boy simply *holding hands* with another boy vomit (and violence) worthy.

With that knowledge Billy really, *really* shouldn't have brought that pretty boy home after school.

But he did.

The sad-but-funny part is that it wasn't even *Neil* that caught the two of them making out in Billy's room. No, it was Max. She'd busted in saying something Billy couldn't hear over the blood rushing in his

ears, and caught them mid grope-session, faces barely an inch apart.

Her cheeks turned a deep shade of red and she slammed the door shut.

About an hour later, after Billy had helped the guy sneak out of his bedroom window, Neil was kicking in his ribs and hurling the word *faggot* at him like it was going out of style.

Which meant *Max told him*.

Billy couldn't trust her anymore, and that sucked way more than the broken ribs and concussion Neil gave him.

Max was the good part of the bullshit marriage Susan and Neil had. She was his calm breeze in the shitstorm Billy called his life. They had fun together, they talked like everything was normal (which it definitely *was not*) and they could *trust each other*.

But that was gone in a little over sixty minutes.

He was mad and he wanted someone to blame besides himself or his dad, so he chose Max. So everything after that became *her fault*. He chanted it in his head like a fucking mantra, just so he wouldn't completely hate himself. He had so little respect for himself left that shifting the blame to her was his only way of staying on the right side of self-destructive; the only way he wouldn't spontaneously implode with how fucked he thought (still thinks) he was (is).

So after that he stopped being the big brother she'd always wanted, purely out of spite, even though he knew she didn't tell on purpose. She couldn't have known Neil would be a complete douche about it.

Billy ended up spending a few days in the hospital for some broken ribs and a concussion. His would go blurry in and out, he wobbled when he walked, couldn't breathe right or without it hurting his chest, and every once in a while his ears would ring so loud that it blocked out any other sounds.

It's not the fact that Billy was necking with a *guy* that makes Neil move them all to Butt Fuck Nowhere, Indiana once Billy's ribs healed. No, it's the questions from the doctors and nurses that get them out of

Cali. He said it was to keep Billy away from the 'temptation' in Cali, but Billy knew it wasn't. He knew the hospital asked questions that made Neil look bad, made him nervous with the possibility of the cops being called in and that he couldn't come up with a very convincing lie, so he shipped the family off to another state to avoid the trouble all together.

Max blamed Billy.

Billy blamed Max.

They both should have pinned the blame on Neil, but they didn't.

The first time Billy saw Steve Harrington he thought *pretty pretty pretty*.

Then immediately started to hate himself just a little bit more.

This is why we moved, he thought bitterly. *Because you're-*

He couldn't finish the thought. That would be like giving into Neil's bullshit and Billy wasn't going to do that *outside*, too. He figured as long as he kept those thoughts to a minimum and never acted on them, he would be fine.

Besides, Harrington had a pretty little girlfriend always by his side and Billy knew he couldn't compete with that.

(Not that he *wanted* to compete with Little Miss Perfect for Harrington. No fucking way.)

He stuck to girls, picked through the crowds of small town girls (or cows, as he referred to them more than a few times) until he knew all the pretty ones by name, and then started to work his way through the rest of them. He avoided the redheads, though. *Too much like her*, he would think when he saw them. Could never get close to one of them without his chest tightening in a way he taught himself to hate. The way that meant he missed *her*, and Billy was told at a young age that *missing people was a sign of weakness*.

Parties and sex (with girls, of course, because he couldn't risk Neil

hearing about any *male* partners) were his biggest distractions from the itch he felt to scream and fight and *hurt*. He hated Hawkins with a passion, wanted nothing but to go back to Cali. It was his home, where his mom was buried, and it was *warm*. Hawkins was cold as a witches tit and small as fuck, and Billy *hated it*.

But the parties were fun, the sex was decent, and messing with Harrington whenever he could was interesting.

It didn't take too long for him to become the new King of Hawkins High.

He doesn't remember much of *The Incident*.

That's what Max and her Nerd Herd have started calling the fight between Billy and Harrington at the Byers' house.

The clearest memory he has of that night is greeting *King Steve* in the driveway. Asking *am I dreaming or is that you Harrington*, getting a humorless *yeah, it's me, don't cream your pants* in response, then calling Harrington out on his lie about Max not being in the house.

(He could see her in the window for Christ's sake!)

Everything else is kind of hazy from then on.

Up until the needle, anyway. The needle Max jammed in the side his neck while he was caving in Harrington's (pretty) face on the floor. The needle filled with some kind of fast-acting knock-out drug that stopped him from killing Harrington right then and there, in front of a bunch of kids. Oh, and the threat to his balls with the crazy-looking nail bat! That's a pretty prominent memory too.

His tired laughter after he agreed to leave Max's gang of misfits alone was directed more at himself than anything or anyone else. Or maybe it was at the situation, the sight of little Maxine towering over him, holding a baseball bat covered in fucking nails. Either way, it was directed at *him*, and not her or her gang of weirdos and their creepy babysitter who was also half-conscious on the floor.

Her stance and his little blackout rampage and maybe a few other

things that night brought up some shit he'd been trying to push deep, deep down for the last couple years. Punching and punching until his own knuckles bled. Laughing, attacking someone like a rabid animal. All of it, things he half-remembers from his *Demon Days*.

(He doesn't like to use the word *possessed*.)

The way Max had stood over him with that bat raised above her head, that wavering but oh-so tough tone to her voice, that protective fire in her eyes, and the force she put behind smashing the nail riddled end of the bat into the floor between his open legs... Well, that had looked way too much like *her* that day she threatened Neil's safety with a crowbar.

It made him feel *sick* because in that moment he was Neil and Max was *her*.

He was the bad guy now. The legitimate bad guy, like the ones in movies and on TV, the one in their house. He was the asshole threatening kids and beating up people who (maybe, probably) didn't deserve it.

(He still thinks it was really fucking creepy that Harrington was hiding five pre-teens in a shack out in the middle of nowhere, but it might not have been what it looked like. *Maybe*.)

After that night Billy kept his head down. He stayed away from the twerps, didn't talk to Max (even if it got him in trouble with his old man) unless necessary, *lightly* harassed Harrington (mostly during practice and sometimes outside of it), and partied a lot or stayed in his room. He didn't need to interact with people *all the time*, just enough to distract himself.

The worst part about that night was definitely the memories in dredged up. That stupidly long period of time where something supernatural had been piloting his body like it was a Goddamn robot. He'd started getting flashes of things it did with his meat-suit, along with some of the fucked up stuff it showed him of Hell. He'd repressed most of it, but that night brought it all back.

Now he was having nightmares almost *every* night.

The only nights he didn't have them were the ones where he got drunk off his ass before bed. He didn't even need a party to do it. He'd just go to the liquor store real quick and get a bottle of Jack or something else that was just as strong, then bring it home and drink, drink, *drink* until he wasn't thinking properly (or *at all*) anymore.

It became a routine. A shitty, painful, boring routine.

In the past, Billy used to think that his growing anger towards the entire world would make him a great Hunter one day. That he could find *her*, that they could team up, that he could take his rage out on Monsters and *save people* from them.

But after Harrington's week off school, when he comes back with a nearly totally purple face, Billy *actually* feels things about it.

He's not, like, looking to apologize or anything. Doesn't plan on dropping to his knees to beg for forgiveness, or even saying the simple word *sorry* to Harrington's horribly bruised face. He just *feels bad* about what he did. Like, genuinely cringes out of guilt and shit whenever he turns a corner and sees Pretty Boy's stupid face.

Something in the back of his head likes to tell him: *You're the monster, now.*

It's not a new thought.

It's just louder now than it's ever been before.

He's having an already shitty day when he sees Harrington walking down the hall, following behind the usual pairing of Byers and Wheeler.

Today, though, there's a new addition to what is usually a trio. But he doesn't pay much attention to her/him/them.

(Doesn't even look at them long enough to determine if they're a chick or a dude.)

All he knows is that they are *very* female, and they've got dark hair.

Other than *they've got a nice ass*, he doesn't really care to find out more.

He bumps Harrington's shoulder on his way past, sneering out he dickhead's last name, as per usual, then joins his usual group of assholes.

It's almost lunch, he can bug the group of freaks again in a few minutes.

So, sometimes I think about a purely *Stranger Things* Billy/OC fanfic and usually when I think about *that* I end up having to put on "Little Red Riding Hood" by *Sam The Sham The Pharaohs*.

It makes me think about how Billy might follow a girl around that he found more interesting than the rest of the girls in Hawkins.

And when that song is over I listen to a song by *The Sham-ettes* called "Hey There, Big Bad Wolf" because it's the girl's side of the whole thing and I feel like it would be the exact response the OC would have to Billy.

But that's an idea I'll probably never follow through on so...

There ya go, Whoever Feels Like Writing It!

3. Chapter 3

Things have been changed because I cringed when I reread this chapter yesterday.

Sorry.

Her mother gets a call.

Or rather her mother calls someone and recites their temporary phone number, then hangs up.

Then the phone rings a minute later.

That's how she lets their work friends know where they've ended up. She calls them and leaves the number for wherever they are as a message on the answering machine (if they don't pick up), or gives it directly to them (if they actually answer, which is not often). She doesn't leave their names, just in case, and if whoever they called can recognize her voice they call her back at some point to make sure everything is peachy.

This call is weird, though.

And for *them*, that's saying something.

It's from this really weird guy, a conspiracy theorist that moonlights as a scam artist but calls himself a Private Investigator. It always irritates Alice when he calls because about sixty-five percent of the time, it ends up being a false lead. He gives them some bullshit story, crazed rambling from some random drug-addled asshole or another (crazier) conspiracy theorist. They always chase it, just in case, and it's almost always not their kind of case.

This time he calls to ask if the pair will come see him at his place in Illinois. He says he wants to give them a case, but tells them phones are no longer safe to talk over so they have to come see him if they want details.

"*You know where I live.*" He says just before the line dies.

The asshole hung up on them! Didn't even give them a chance to respond.

His renewed paranoia surrounding telephones is what gets the girls in their car and on the road.

When they pull up to Murray's house (it's more like a bunker, really) they're both floored by exactly how much his paranoia had grown since they last saw him in person.

He lives in a shack of sorts now. A shack made of cement with a *very* heavy-looking, sliding, steel front door. There's a security camera way up on the wall above the door, so he can see who's there, and a speaker outside so he can give orders. A microphone, too, so he can hear anything the visitor has to say.

It's all very *Murray*.

Of course, the O'Conner women aren't given the treatment anyone else would get. They're let in right away. Greeted at the door by a grinning Murray in just boxers, a stained t-shirt, and an open robe covered in even more stains (*ew!*). He looks just as on edge as always. Like he's had a few too many espresso shots.

At least he's not *drunk*.

He leads them to a small space in the back of his 'house' where the walls are covered in papers and red string that connects facts Murray thinks relate to each other. *There's a lot of string pinned up*, she notes silently, then zones out on a photocopied sketch of a little bald kid. Their eyes are dark, haunted, almost *terrifying*. Just above that drawing is a piece of paper that simply says *Russian?* and it confuses her to no end.

But that's how Murray works, y'know?

He goes for *The Government's Being A Dickhead* angle instead of *Supernatural Bullshit* nine times out of ten, so of course he would think it had something to do with 'the commies' everyone's so worked up about.

Her mother and Murray are deep in a whispered conversation which to Alice means she has a right to roam. A *right* that she uses to snoop and study and look over most of the Crazy Man's spiderweb of theories and research. One of the most focused on pieces of information is a newspaper clipping from November of 1983, about a boy who 'came back to life'. The little preteen in the picture is kind of adorable in a hugely dorky way with his bowl cut and awkward smile most school photos manage to capture.

(Not that she had many of *her own* taken, but she knows what it looks like on other kids.)

The article says something about his mom telling reporters he was abducted by the government, and Alice sighs.

She's glad it wasn't actually something up her alley, but she's also a little disappointed that there's another conspiracy theorist in the world who blames *The Man* for the 'bad shit that happens to good people'. Like, it sometimes *is*, but more often it's *not*.

After a few hours and a couple glasses of watered down vodka Murray shows them to their temporary sleeping arrangements. Says something about how they might want to avoid the pullout couch in the other room but doesn't give a reason. He just smirks like he's made some sort of joke that they should be in on but aren't.

Alice decides *fuck it* and goes in there anyway because she wants some *Goddamn privacy* for once, and she wants to be as far away from Murray as possible because he kind of creeps her out. It's not that she thinks he'd *do* anything to her while she's asleep, and it's not like he could actually do anything to her because Alice is trained to (hypothetically, figuratively, *whatever*) kill monsters in her sleep. She just doesn't think she would be able to tell him apart from a psycho non-human if he were suddenly replaced by one, and that worries her.

It makes her uneasy enough to hide behind a door.

(A fairly flimsy door, but still.)

Her mother gave her a quick rundown of their plan before going off

to her own bed.

Tomorrow the two of them will head to Hawkins to investigate. Maybe it's nothing, maybe they get to kill something. Who really knows with Murray's crap. Alice looks forward to the *killing something* part, if it happens. Lord knows she has some anger issues she needs to work out. And the best recipient of those issues is always a monster at the end of a blunt object that Alice is holding. Preferably where she can bash it's face in.

She unintentionally stays awake well past sunrise, going over notes she made in her journal after snooping around Murray's work area. It's anything and everything she could remember off the top of her head, which isn't too hard to do considering how *awesome* her memory is. Really, it's fucking *great*.

Jan. 17th, 1985.

Indiana (in general) (I guess)(?)

Will Byers

-Died and came back a week later

-They say he was lost in the woods but that seems like bullshit

-Possibly possessed (or was never human in the first place)

Russian(?) Girl

-PSIONIC? I think the nutjob finally lost his last marble!

-Usually only Demons can do that psychic shit (what is she?)

Nancy Wheeler and Jonathan Byers

-Murray mentioned them to ma and I don't know why...

Chief Hopper

-Murray said he's an ass and won't talk to anyone outside of cops and government dudes but I'm sure ma could get him to talk with a little of her 'charisma' (ew ugh)

Barbara Holland

-The papers say she died from some chemical spill but Murray says that's bull. Says he made it up with some kids from that town.

-I'm sure it was more them than him

Hawkins is a super weird town in the middle of butt-fuck nowhere

Murray has shit luck

Someone stole all of his "really important notes" about the shit going on in Hawkins which is actually pretty funny

When has he ever had anything important?

Like ever?

Never is the appropriate answer.

Don't trust anyone!

That's what Murray told Ma

Said the Government has the whole town wired or something equally as crazy

But my gut's telling me he might be right this time

This is the only time I'll ever take that whacko's advice

She puts the journal and pen back in her bag, then curls up into a ball under the itchy, worn out afghan Murray loaned her and tries to get at least an hour or so of sleep. They're leaving early tomorrow (*today*), and she needs as much energy as she can get for when they unload all the boxes from the car. Apparently, they'll be staying in Hawkins long enough to warrant cleaning out the storage locker they've rented for the past few years.

That's never happened before...

She dozes off before she can really question it.

They don't have to search very hard to find a place to hunker down in. It's a house that was put up for sale back in November, but never sold because of a death or something. Nobody told either of them if the person died inside the house or not, but the fact that death in general occurred on the property scared other buyers off. A possible ghost in their new home is one thing both women are *not* afraid of dealing with, unlike most people, and so they got it pretty cheap.

They only decided to get the house because there isn't a motel *in* or

even *around* town. They had to spend a good chunk of their savings on it, but they really didn't have a choice. Besides, it's not like they *bought* the house, they're just *renting* it for a while. They won't need it longer than a few months at most, anyway. Only as long as necessary.

It's not *all* bad, though.

Alice gets privacy in the form of a bedroom that has a bed and a window and a private bathroom. Downstairs there's a living room with a television and a decent sized couch. There's a normal kitchen instead of just a sink, counter, and coffee maker, which is near the back door that leads to a large backyard. And outside there's a garage where her mother can hide the car they're both so fond of. Her *dad's* car.

That same afternoon, after they get all their shit into the house and sort it out by room, leaving everything in their boxes, she stays in the living room while her mom takes a nap upstairs. The house is basically silent minus the quietly playing rock music Alice put on to feel a little more comfortable while sorting through a couple of the boxes. Labeled for shared spaces, because that shit needed sorting out before anything else.

Most of it is, surprisingly, mundane shit. Actual normal household items like plain white dishes, decent books by a couple famous authors, and some nik-naks for shelves. There's even an old photo album stuffed into the bottom of one box, only the second she goes through, and she ends up going through *that* instead of anymore boxes.

But she knows her mom would burn it, like she did with the others before their life-long roadtrip started, so she hides it under the mattress of her new bed before she goes to sleep that night.

Yo! It's been a while, huh?

I've been kinda busy with (finally) binge watching *Hannibal* on Netflix and then reading tons of Hannibal/Will fics on Ao3. I also got a job recently which, sadly, cuts into a lot of stuff I like to do; like writing and junk.

But here *this* is, edited and shit, after sitting in my Docs area for like four months.

Hope you don't mind my minimal updates!

4. Chapter 4

Her part of the job is simple.

That's what her mom told her, anyway.

All she has to do is enroll in school, try to find anything out of the ordinary that could help their research, discreetly ask around about *stuff*, maybe gain some student and/or staff trust so she can get the *real* dirt. According to her mother, teenagers are notorious gossips. And if they trust you enough they'll tell you they're greatest fears and weaknesses.

Which might include government secrets if they have any.

Sounds simple, right?

Yeah, *no*, it's not.

It's mostly because of the fact that she can't stand people her own age and *really* doesn't want to be surrounded by them eight hours a day, five days a week. But she also hates school in general with the crowds that form in the halls and the boredom being trapped inside all day brings on.

That, and she has trouble keeping up with everyone else. In the other schools she's gone to her grades got her weird looks from the teachers and they would pull her away to talk about it. Always told her to *apply herself more* and *try harder*.

Fuck that, she always thinks after they give their stupid speech. *I'm here to save lives, not learn about old dudes who started wars because they felt the need to compensate for something.*

But really, it's her own fault that she's way behind everyone else education-wise. *She's* the one who asked her mom to let her basically *drop out* when she was younger, after all.

All of *that* is going to give her an attitude that she can't help (a *bad* one) which will probably stir some shit up once in a while.

Still, on her mother's insistence she enrolled at the local High School and now she's going to classes after nearly three years of *not*. But, as a small act of rebellion she walks into the building at around eleven-thirty in the afternoon because *fuck school* and *fuck punctuality*. The secretary in the front office gives her a *look* and she gives one right back (a grin, all pearly white teeth and hatred) because she doesn't appreciate being looked at like a criminal by people who don't know her. She's amused by the look of absolute relief on the woman's face when the principal comes out and calls her into his office.

The pompous asshole assigns her a guide. Another student, a girl apparently, that the teachers think the world of for some reason. Someone who seems to have good enough grades to be able to skip class for a while and a (grossly) positive attitude, from what little she's been told so far.

"Maybe you could learn something from her." The principal tells her passive-aggressively as he leads her out of his office.

He obviously read her teeny-tiny school record (fighting, skipping class, crappy attitude and behavior, ect.) and has apparently decided to label her *trouble* because of what he found in there.

(Honestly, though? Fuck this guy! What a douche...)

When the door swings open Alice is left staring at a small, mousy-looking girl with big blue eyes and a nervous smile. The stranger has to be at least three inches shorter than Alice, even though she's wearing a pair of shoes with short heels. She's nearly rail-thin, too, looking like she might blow away in the wind sometime soon.

The tiny smile turns into nervous lip biting that Alice thinks is kind of cute.

She gives the girl a flirty smirk and crosses one ankle over the other, resting her shoulder against the door frame, arms crossed tight over her chest. It's one of few flirting poses she knows and it sometimes convinces nervous girls to chill out a bit. Not so much in *this case*, seeing as it can also be a slightly intimidating stance, but usually it does.

"Well then, Miss Wheeler, I trust you have *this* all handled?" He says pointedly, like Alice is a mangy mutt that needs someone to keep it in line.

Alice *almost* growls at him like one too, but holds it back at the last second and opts to glare at him instead.

"Yes, sir." 'Miss Wheeler' replies, sounding offended enough for both of them.

Alice finds a speck of appreciation for the girl in that moment, and hopes they manage to get along during the short time she'll be living in Hawkins.

They step out of the office together, Wheeler's thin arm wrapped around Alice's own slightly muscular one, perfectly in step with each other. Waiting for them in the hall are two boys.

Introductions are made.

Wheeler's first name is Nancy, apparently, and now that Alice has a moment to soak the new information in, some shit starts clicking into place in Alice's *Work* headspace.

This is the girl Murray talked to.

One of the boys is Jonathan, most likely Jonathan *Byers*, and Nancy's boyfriend which means he's probably with her ninety-nine percent of the time during most days of the week. He's all *brooding expression* and *slumped shoulders*. His eyes covered by his long bangs. She thinks he's probably like this a lot, because he looks your typical *Loner* type. But he also looks like he could be pretty fun to hang out with. She wonders if a little Chill Time together might help him open up about some *stuff*.

Stuff like his possibly possessed little brother.

That would help this job go by a lot faster, that's for damn sure.

The other guy is Steve. He's got insanely fluffy hair and big brown eyes, and Alice has to admit that he's pretty good-looking and fairly charming. All smiles and kind words and an air of calmness that she

hasn't felt in a long time. But there's something *wrong* in his eyes. Something dark that she wants to stay away from. It almost looks like he's got voices in his head or shadows at the borders of his vision.

(There's something *wrong* in all of their eyes, but Nancy and Jonathan know how to hide it better than Steve.)

But he's also got some bruises on that pretty face of his. There's one just under his right eye, trailing along the cheek bone, and his lip is split on the left side, along with a small bruise near his left temple. There are even faint finger-shaped marks on both sides of his neck. She looks at his knuckles, just to check, and notices that they're bruised as well. A couple little splits in the skin there, which means he at least fought back a bit.

She's pulled out her quiet observations when someone walks past them. He passes on Steve's side, purposefully bumping shoulders with him. Then the asshole sneers out what Alice assumes is Steve's last name without looking back, waving lazily at the four of them over his shoulder as he walks towards a tiny group of people who are most likely his shitty friends. They're probably going to laugh at the fucking dumb thing he just did, or just at the four of them in general. Because that's what shitty people do.

(He seems like a kinda shitty person based on her first impression of him.)

She leans in close to Steve and stage-whispers, "I could kick his ass, if ya want."

She can hear Nancy's stifled giggle and see Jonathan's tiny smile from the corner of her eye.

"Pfft, no it's fine. We have this sort of-" He waves his hand in the air in a little dismissive circle with a smirk. "-*agreement*."

"Kay then." She replies, and shrugs as she shoves her hands into the pockets of her jeans. "Who is he anyways?"

"Should we even tell her about him?" Steve asks the other two.

Nancy gives him a little smirk, "You sound like you don't wanna

share her, Steve."

He blushes and looks at the floor. Alice smiles. She likes the idea of someone wanting to keep her all to himself and away from the assholes. She's never really had someone like that before. At least, not in a few years.

(Honestly, with the way her life goes most of the time she *really* should have seen the shit that comes next from *miles away*.)

"We don't even really *need* to." Jonathan says with a lazy half-shrug. "Eventually Tommy will start going off about a new girl in school and Billy will hunt her down so he can hit on her."

Alice freezes and turns her gaze from the trio to the broad-shouldered back at the end of the hall.

Blonde hair, Tough Guy attitude, jean jacket...

"Billy?" She whispers to herself.

Steve, being the closest one to her, hears her perfectly. Nancy and Jon keep discussing the pros and cons of telling Alice anything about the blonde.

"Huh?"

She wasn't going to ask because she didn't really believe it, but then she decides to give it a shot. Turns and asks them as a whole what Billy's last name is in such a hopeful tone of voice that she even throws herself off a little.

"Hargrove." Steve tells her, eyebrows knitted together and lips pursed just so. "Why?"

She takes a deep breath.

There was something about him that seemed familiar when she watched him walk away, but she'd pushed the idea to the back of her head and didn't dwell on it. Now she wishes she had because maybe it was something in the way he walked (with that stupid swagger of his that was almost *too* macho), or maybe it was the colour of his hair

(how gold it looked under the bright lights above the halls) and the unusual length for a guy in *this* kind of small town.

It might've (no, *definitely*) had something to do with his cologne. She hasn't found anything like it since she smelled it on him four years ago, and apparently he hasn't stopped wearing it since then, either.

She lets out the breath she's been holding slowly, through her nose, then takes another deep breath to calm her nerves and lets that one out too.

She's started walking before she even thinks about it.

Nancy calls out to her, probably because she thinks Alice is about to get herself killed. But she's *not*. Billy, for all his asshole-ish-ness, would never hit a woman. He has some kind of *code* that he was pretty religious about, which includes never hitting a woman/girl/lady/female unless *absolutely necessary*. He told her about it when she was teaching him to fight and told him to try punching her.

("How chivalrous of you." She'd said sarcastically and rolled her eyes. "I can take it, Billiam, so *hit me!*")

She ignores her guide calling to her in favor of picking up the pace. She can't stop staring as she stalks towards him, taking in his grown out mullet and his broad shoulders. When they met they'd been basically the same height, maybe an inch apart, and he'd been pretty scrawny. But he's almost eighteen now, not fourteen like they'd been back then, so of course he's grown up. She has too, but it's only a little hop in comparison to the gigantic leap Billy's made.

When she's barely a couple inches away from him she reaches up and taps him on the shoulder with one of her black-painted fingernails, only vaguely aware of the footsteps approaching from behind her.

(She could tell they were a little afraid of Billy while they talked about him, and she plans on asking him *why* at some point because she knows he'll tell her seeing as he has a hard time saying 'no' to his (hopefully *best*) friend/the girl who saved his life.)

Billy turns to glare at her.

He obviously doesn't recognize her, but his glare turns into a cocky smirk when he sees that she's a girl. He gives her three would-be protectors a little uninterested look over her shoulder before he goes back to smirking down at her. She realizes pretty quickly that this must be the look he gives most girls, the ones he plans to hit on anyways, and it might have disappointed her a little that he doesn't recognize her right away if she wasn't so fucking happy to finally see him again.

Instead of simply telling him it's her, she places both hands on her waist and juts one hip to the side, mirroring the look he's been giving her for the last minute-and-a-bit and stands her ground as she stares up at the boy her new friends seem so afraid of.

(She knows isn't as bad as they think. He's an 'acquired taste', to put it in some fancy-schmancy terms.)

From her peripheral she can see just how freaked out Jonathan and Nancy look. Even Steve is leaning forward so he can stare at her like she's crazy. Which, honestly, is good in her books. Looking crazy means nobody will want to fuck with her.

"Anyone ever told you to *not* be a gigantic asshat?" She asks playfully from her seat, staring up at him with an amused smirk.

Nancy snorts from behind her. The couple behind Billy snicker, probably expecting some kind of explosive confrontation that is definitely *not* going to happen.

"What?"

The venom in his voice is a little off putting but Alice can deal. She's gotten it from him before so she's not frightened by it like most people probably are. It's the same tone he gave her when he first woke up after the exorcism, when he went on about being *kidnapped* and demanded to know *where he was* and *what happened* and *why he was so fucked up*.

She clucks her tongue like a disappointed mother might and pretends to flip her hair over her shoulder. It's all held back by a hair clip because of how tangled it is, so she looks a little stupid when she

does it, but she feels it makes a some kind of stupid point or makes her seem less nervous (because that's what she is: *nervous*).

So... whatever, right?

"Like, I know I'm not a *ginger* anymore, but I *had* to dye it. Life or death situation, I swear! And, *yeah*, there's a couple pieces of metal stuck in my face, but I like them, *okay*? Or maybe the boobs are what's throwin' you off? They *for sure* weren't there last time we saw each other, and even *I* forget they're there sometimes. Which is just fuckin' *stupid* because, like, their *mine*?"

(It's all new. Nothing like her bright orange hair, piercing-free face, and flat chest from years ago. Nowadays it's black hair, gold piercings in her nose and eyebrow, and a C-cup bust that she wrangles into B-cup status for work reasons.)

He's staring at her like she's dumb which is *probably* (definitely) because she started rambling without really breathing, but give her a damn break, okay! She's a strange mix of excited and nervous right now, so she's a little on the *weird* side.

Weirder than usual, anyway.

"What the fuck?"

"Oh my *God*, Billiam, are you that fuckin' *dense*?!" She exclaims, ending with a gravely, drawn-out groan as she roughly pulls a hand down her face.

Nancy probably thinks she's saving her new friend from something *bad* when she grabs her by the bicep and gently says, "Maybe we should *go*, Alice."

And, in a way, she kind of *does* save her.

Nancy kicks the fear that Billy *forgot her* right out on it's ass when she says her name. Hearing her name and putting everything she said together in his head? *That's* what makes Billy finally fucking *get it*. This little flash of recognition passes through his eyes and that smirk comes back, just less *cocky* and more *excited* this time. She returns it in full, of course. Especially when he scoops her up for a bone-

crushing hug and doesn't put her down once he's done squeezing.

She wraps her arms around his neck, leaving only a little spot on the left side where she can bury her face.

(She is definitely *not* on the verge of crying right now, *fuck you very much.*)

"Holy shit!" He says, and if his voice cracks a little the people around them know better than to say anything about it. "Jesus Christ, Al, what the shit are you even doing in Buttfuck Nowhere, Indiana!?"

"The usual." She laughs. "Which, y'know, not my *favourite*. But *you*, my friend, are a *grand* fuckin' surprise!"

She pulls back from his neck to get a good look at his face and how much he's changed. Grabs his face with both hands and turns it to one side, then the other, and finally back to look her in the eye. She smiles at him again, this time sweetly instead of her usual half-grin half-smile, happy with that fact that there are no visible scars marring his pretty features.

"Didn't even recognize you!" He mumbles, looking over her face as well. "The Hell did you do to yourself?"

She rolls her eyes, smiling at him fondly but also like he's a moron. "Oh, fuck you *and* your stupid fuckin' mullet."

"No, fuck *you*. My hair is amazing."

He places her back on the ground *gently* (something the few people around them were unaware he was capable of being), then takes her face between his hands and looks her over again. She watches his eyes flit from her nose to her eyebrow, then her eyes, and finally her mouth. He barks out a laugh as he lets her go and then pulls her in for a one-armed hug.

She wraps her arms around his waist and squeezes, enjoying the new height difference between them. He's got about four or five inches on her now. And if she wasn't so happy right now, she might make some dirty mental jokes about 'inches'. Billy looks down to where she's still lightly clinging him and gives her shoulder a quick squeeze that pulls

her a little tighter into his side.

"Missed ya, *California Dreamin'*."

"Okay, *Wonderland*, nuff with the mushy shit."

"Oh, right, 'cause you're the Big Bad Wolf and you have a rep to keep up." She teases. "My bad~"

His attention finally shifts from her to the trio she just now decided to deem Cerberus (get it? There's *three of them* and Cerberus has *three heads*? It's dumb but it works!). They've all been watching the scene unfold with wide eyes, surprised that Billy has any female friends, but also by the coincidence of someone he knows from outside of Hawkins suddenly coming to town.

He's glaring (at Steve in particular) when he practically snarls, "The fuck you lookin' at?"

They all glare back. She watches Steve's fists clench at his sides, Nancy's arms tighten around the books she's holding against her chest, and Jon's only visible hand grip the strap of his bag hard.

Alice steps between the two sides of the stand-off, looking at them all with a little bit of amusement visible in her eyes. She knows Billy can see it for sure, but she's not so sure about the others. "Alright, we get it. There's issues between everyone here, but let's *not* start a brawl *inside* the school, yeah? Don't want anyone callin' parents and shit, right?"

That last bit is mostly for Billy. Like, she assumes everyone here would have a bad time if their parents got a call about fighting from the school. Most parents would flip their shit, she figures. Even *her* mother got uppity when they called her about Alice's repeatedly skipped classes.

"Why're they even-"

"I got assigned a babysitter, alright? Which is *Nancy*, by the way, not your apparent *archenemy*, Steve. So, chill." She taps his chin lightly with her index finger, his mouth closing with an audible click of his teeth. "Put the fangs away, big boy."

"Fuck off." He grumbles, but it's said with some of the fondness of that week four years ago. Then he deflates and sighs, long suffering and overdramatic, the way she's used to from him. "You gotta stick with 'em all day?"

"Only for the shared classes, I think. Principal seems to think Nancy Drew'll keep me in check."

He snorts.

"Talked about me like a pissed of stray dog that needed training." She tells him, then reaches out to pinch Nancy's cheek affectionately. "But Nancy got all passive-aggressive on him for me and doesn't seem to think the same."

The girl in question smiles and blushes.

"And the boys ain't so bad." She adds with a shrug.

Jonathan gives her a little bashful smile while Steve just snorts.

(The poor guy probably thinks she'll never talk to him again now that he knows she's best buddies with a guy he absolutely *hates*.)

"I'm guna chill with these cuties for a bit, but I'll see ya after school." She pulls him down by the collar of his jacket and gives him a quick peck on the cheek. "Okay?"

He grins. "Need a ride home?"

"You've got a car?" She asks excitedly. "*Please* tell me she's a beauty."

"You're guna love 'er."

The end of the day couldn't come fast enough!

Alice is pretty miffed that she doesn't share her next class with Billy. She's sure that him and his stupid mullet would make the boring lesson somewhat bearable. But *no*. No, she's stuck in boring-ass Calculus on her own, then a fucking History lesson after that which she opts to skip out on. As far as she knows they have the same

English, Chemistry and Gym times, though, which is better than nothing she decides.

But she skips the rest of the day, and now she has no clue what she's going to do until Billy gets out of class.

It's times like *these* where she's glad to be so good at sneaking around because it makes finding a place to hide after ducking out a whole lot easier. Sadly, her final hiding place ends up being outside, seeing as teachers hate the cold just as much as students. And it turns out to be a *really* stupid decision because *holy shit, Indiana is fucking cold in February!*

And now she has to sit out in that cold for a little less than an hour, or go back inside and face whatever scrutiny she might fall under for being late to class.

Yeah, no, she'll stick to the cold of Indiana in February, *thank you very much.*

She waits in the alley between school buildings, an area she's sure is a popular smoking spot. Leaning back against a wall and kicking at the dirt, she thinks about just how *lucky* she's been this week. She knows that the other shoe will probably drop soon. Something shitty and unfair and possibly rage-inducing *has* to be waiting on the sidelines for it's chance to fuck with her. But for now, she just wants to revel in the *greatness* that is the weight on her chest disappearing slowly but surely.

Four years of fucking *nothing* from the only friend that's ever stuck by her, and she ends up finding him in the small town of Hawkins, Indiana. Hell, she wants to call it fate but that sounds way too cheesy.

Distantly, Alice realizes that angry, irritating, fun to fuck around with Billy jumped out of one fairly fucked up situation in Cali only to jump into a possibly *even more* fucked situation in Indiana. California is a favourite among Demons because they love all the sin that rolls off people in certain areas of the sunny state, so getting possessed there? Yeah, that's about a seventy-five percent possible.

It's mostly *just* Demons in California, but Hawkins?

Well, Hawkins is like a beacon to supernatural creatures from what she's learned.

During the weekend, between unloading boxes and unpacking those same boxes, Alice researched some of the weird shit that's been happening here as of late. Some people disappearing and other's that turned up as 'remains' from an 'animal attack'. She can see signs of monster attacks in the newspapers that talk about sleepy little Hawkins.

People disappearing could easily be mistaken as running away from home, or just moving somewhere bigger and better without telling anyone.

Human remains could mean a few things. Like maybe a Wendigo or a Werewolf. It looked like an animal attack, after all, and both creatures eat people. But Werewolves just want hearts for dinner, whereas a Wendigo would want *everything*, so there's a good chance it was neither.

A wave a nausea rolls over her as a disgusting idea run through her head. *Oh God, what if a Werewolf and a Wendigo are working together? Sharing their kills and, like, eating together like some kind of fucked up family meal-*

She sighs. That train of thought is getting a little too morbid now, even for *her*. She's been having such a good day, up until the moment her brain dove into Work Mode.

At least it wasted some time, she tells herself when the bell rings.

The last class of the day lets out finally which means she can climb into a warm car soon.

She steps away from the wall and slowly makes her way to the front door of the school. It takes less than five minutes for Billy to come rushing down the front steps, smiling with an unlit cigarette between his lips. He lights up the second he's next to her, takes a long drag, then passes it over. She takes it and follows when he motions for her

to do so. It's a nice reminder of Cali and the way Billy lead her everywhere, showing her his favourite spots and some of his less favored, but still interesting, places to hang out.

Anywhere but home, she remembers him saying once.

He walks her to a shiny blue Camaro, stopping next to it and leaning against the passenger's side door with a grin. She takes a step towards it and hands him the smoke at the same time she reaches out to lightly run her fingers along the hood of it.

"She's so pretty I'm almost *jealous*."

"Don't worry," He blows a big ol' cloud of smoke in her direction, giving her a little grin when she mock-glares at him for doing it. "You're pretty too. Actually, it's probably a tie, to be honest."

"You're such a prick."

He shrugs, passes her the half-gone stick, stuffs his hands in his pockets with a lazy shrug.

"Not that I'm complainin' or anything, but why are we still here?"

He huffs and looks away, his eyes landing on the middle school building. "Gotta drive someone else home too."

"How long 'til they get here?"

"Dunno, she's a little shit. Always fuckin' late." He grumbles.

Uh oh, she thinks with a sigh. *Bill's grumpy...*

"Your girlfriend?" She jokes.

"Fuck no."

Alice feels like it would be a fucking *spectacular* idea to just shut the Hell up for a bit now, and passes the cig back.

Billy looks at her for a second as he takes another drag, before his expression softens. He looks kind of defeated, like he feels *bad* or

something, and Alice doesn't know why he would feel that way.

He tries to explain, starting quietly with, "Sorry. It's just-" but then he heaves a long sigh that comes out in a cloud of smoke.

(She can't stop herself from imagining Billy as an ornery dragon that hordes pretty cars like his Camaro.)

Alice remembers then that Billy's never been very good with words when he thinks he needs to be. She tries to comfort him with just a look and moves to lean against him, shoving him playfully with her shoulder a couple times until he looks down at her. When he does, she links her arm with his and drops her head against his shoulder.

They get a few minutes of semi-quiet waiting before their third-wheel shows up.

"Who're you?"

She jumps almost a foot in the air at the sudden appearance of a redheaded preteen girl, knocking hard into Billy's arm in the process and nearly toppling them both over. The girl popped up out of fucking *nowhere*, glares at Billy and then stares at Alice with her arms crossed and hip jutted out.

"This who we're waitin' on?" She asks Billy without looking away from the girl.

He tosses the finished cig on the ground and stomps it out as he wiggles his arm out of her grip, then pretty much stomps around to the opposite side of the car, and slides into the driver's seat. He doesn't answer but he really doesn't need to considering the little girl is climbing into the back seat before she can yell one of her stupid nicknames at him to get his attention. Defeated and a little ticked off, she drops into the passenger's seat with an annoyed huff and keeps her mouth clamped shut the entire time.

Or, she tries to, but then the girl in the back is leaning forward between the front seats.

"Who're you?" She asks again.

"Could ask you the same thing. You weren't around when I was in Cali."

Billy cuts in with, "No, but you were there the first time Neil brought Susan over."

She assumes Susan is *Max's* mom, because she already knows where *Billy's* mom is...

"I was?"

"Zeppelin. My place. You told me to, and I quote, *shut my douche-nozzle*."

Max snorts as she sits back down and buckles up.

(Alice remembers that night. The quietly grumbled explanation Billy gave her after they'd been laying on his bed for a while. He came into his room looking more miserable than usual that night, because his dad being *nice*? Well, that'd fucked with his head way more than getting his ass kicked ever would.)

The way he imitates her voice when he quotes her is just bad enough to make her giggle, and that gets him to smile a bit, but both reactions die out all too quickly when they remember they have a one-person audience.

"Ah, well, I'm Alice." She turns in her seat to look at the tiny, fiery-looking preteen. "Nice t'meet ya."

She scoffs, crossing her arms again. "You're not guna get on his good side by being nice to me."

"I'm *already* on his good side." She replies with a grin, then turns to Billy, eyes narrowed, faking some kind of offended/anger combo. "What kinda girls you been bringin' around this girl, Billiam?"

(Alice just barely registers Max whispering '*Billiam*' like it's the funniest shit she's ever heard. But she definitely catches her little shit smirking in the rearview mirror.)

"Jesus, could ya fuckin' *not*?"

Max scrunches up her nose, looks kind of like a little redheaded mouse when she does it, and basically flips her shit on Billy. "Why should she? Are you guna hit her if she doesn't?"

"*Maxine...*" Billy warns.

"Well, Max, I'll have you know that Billy loves me *way* too much to do that."

"I don't-"

"No, shush, Bills! You *love* me and you *know* it."

"I will *pull over* and make you *walk* home, Wonderland."

"And *that* proves it! That name is special, so you *gotta* love me."

"For fuck's sake..." He grumbles.

"Hey, chill. I like it." She tells him, and then adds in a mumble: "At least *someone* loves me."

It's supposed to be funny. Really. It *totally* is. The tone of her voice is joking enough to make it sound like a genuine jab at herself, but the nervous way she laughs at the end makes that one dumb sentence seem a little too serious. Sound almost *too* real. Billy side-glance at her, looking worried, probably trying to figure out if she's about to... *something*. Either break down or just flat out cry.

(She doesn't exactly *appreciate* that look.)

"Aaaaaand I'm guna shut my face now. Ignore me! All good over here..."

"You never used to talk this much." Billy mutters.

She takes offense to that. His tone suggests he likes her better when she's quiet, and she's always thought he was fond of the exact opposite.

"And *you* weren't always such a dickbag." She bites back.

Max chimes in with a curt, "Agreed."

"Yeah, well, one of you is a tattlin' little *bitch*, and the other decided to fucking *leave* on some kinda *suicide mission*, so-"

He stops, takes a deep breath, blows it out slowly through his nose.

There's a long pause and then-

"It's more like a *get myself murdered* mission, but okay, yeah, I can kinda see your point."

She says it with a shrug, so casual about her impending demise that she could have just said the *sky* is fucking *blue* or something like that. That's how matter-of-fact and chill she is, and it would be unnerving to anyone that doesn't know what she *does*.

Billy answers with a glare and a quiet *fuck you*.

Suddenly they're pulling into the driveway of what Alice assumes is Billy's house. Just as Max is about to leave Alice turns around in her seat to look at the smaller girl, says her full name just to get her attention.

"If you need me for, like, *anything*-" *Especially Neil's bullshit*, she wants to add. "-then you call me. I'll give my number to Bill because I sure as shit can't trust any phone number *he* gives *me*."

Max gives her a weird look, but nods slowly anyway and slides out of the car. Billy doesn't take off until she closes the front door behind her.

"Ma got a job in town." She tells him once they've gotten far enough from the house for Billy to relax a little. "That's why I'm here."

He looks concerned for a second, but that quickly switches to something more serious. He's got a little frown going, furrowed brows and everything.

"Is it bad?"

He whispers it like someone might hear them even though they're the only ones in his car right now.

"We don't know yet." She picks at the frayed edges of the rips in her jeans. "It's got something to do with the mangled bodies in the woods and some of the missing persons reports. That's all I got so far."

"Need any help?"

"Pffft, you'd just get in the way." She gives him a dismissive wave. After a few seconds staring out the windshield she turns to look up at him with narrowed eyes, then pokes him in the ribs with one of her bony fingers. "Heard you've been a bit of a cock lately, Billiam."

Billy looks her in the eyes and (surprisingly) ignores the embarrassingly *dumb* nickname, then turns his head to look at the road again.

"What'd Harrington tell you?"

"Nothing. Said something about having some kind of *agreement* when I offered to kick your ass this morning, but left it at that. I'm guessing you fought him, what with all the bruises on both your faces."

"Not all of 'em are from the Princess. He can't hit for shit."

Ah, okay. She gets it.

Now would probably be a good time to change topics...

"I called and you never picked up."

He shifts a little in his seat, refusing to even glance at her. "When did you call?"

"About two weeks after I left."

"Did ya call in the middle of the day? 'Cause I'd've been in school 'round then."

"I called at *night*, on *weekends*, in the *afternoon*. For six months I called every other day. And on, like, the seventh month I called *every*

day." Her fists clench at her sides as a way to distract herself from the sudden urge to cry. She's too drained to rein in her emotions in a less painful way, she needs her fingernails digging into her palms to keep herself somewhat calm. "I gave up after a while and started obsessively watching the news for your murder report."

He snorts, "I had to hang with the shitbird pretty much all the time. Warden's orders. Then they moved in and he rode my ass even harder with his bullshit. I was out of the house as often as I could manage."

"Guess it doesn't help that my number changes every couple weeks, huh?"

"Not really."

"I left it every time I got the answering machine."

"I don't doubt it."

Silence follows. It's almost deafening.

Not too long after that Billy is rolling up the driveway to Alice's new place. He kills the engine, but instead of getting out the two of them continue to sit in silence for a few minutes. They don't look at each other, don't make any sort of noise, don't move an inch. It's a good ten minutes before one of them decides to say something.

"I'm starting to think I actually died." she tells him, laughing dryly. "How else would you explain this-" She gestures between the two of them. "-weird fuckin' coincidence? It's pretty crazy, right?"

Billy shrugs. "Hawkins is a weird town where fucked up shit happens. Get used to it, you might be here a while."

She nods as she mulls over the fact that even mostly-clueless-about-the-weird-shit Billy can tell Hawkins is sitting on some potential supernatural adventures, and then asks, "You wanna stay over?"

He snorts, "Your mom home?"

"She's probably so liquored up that not even a pack of pissed off Hellhounds could get her attention."

"Giving in to stereotypes?"

"Where d'ya think *I* got it from?"

Billy thinks it over real quick, but decides it's smarter and safer for him to just go home. *Don't want to piss Neil off anymore than he already is, after all.* Unfortunately, Alice has no choice but to agree because she knows what happens when Neil Hargrove gets a little too riled up. She heard stories from Billy in those couple of days back then, and she can easily imagine the damage a man like him can inflict when he decides to

She moves to leave, but Billy stops her with a hand on her wrist. She turns slowly, not sure what's about to happen until she sees the rare look of absolute concern on his face. It's stuck there, unlike how he usually buries his normal human emotions and expressions under his snarky grin and shitty attitude.

"We're guna talk about... well, pretty much *everything* tomorrow, you got that?" He tells her with a serious look. "I wanna hear all about the shit you've murdered so far."

"Sure thing, Bill."

They exchange tired smiles before Alice climbs out of the car. She waves over her shoulder to him as she walks to the door and just like with Max, Billy waits until she's safely behind a closed door before he peels out of the driveway.

5. Chapter 5

I apparently haven't touched this fic since, like, August or something. Which is really shitty to the few people who actually like it. And for that I'm sorry. So so so sorry.

It's nearly Christmas. Like 3 more days 'til, according to the thing on my computer screen. So this is an early gift to the people who've been waiting for an update.

It's small, but I've got some ideas lined up that I'm working real hard on, so hold tight 'til then, yeah?

Thanks :)

News of their little reunion in the hallway travels fast

On the upside (maybe), it turns out being an old friend of Billy's automatically makes Alice somewhat of a celebrity in the eyes of the Hawkins High population.

When she goes to school the next day (this time in the morning, and only because Billy offers her a ride) she ends up swarmed. The situation sets off warning bells in her head, much like if the crowd had been made up of monsters that were trying to eat her. She almost lashes out, too, but Billy stops her. Could probably sense her oncoming freak-out better than *she* could. All he has to do place two of his fingers on her wrist to get her attention, and then she looks at him, and he gives her a little smirk that calms her down.

She's never been good at handling attention like this, but somehow he makes it better.

So, yeah. She ends up surrounded by Billy's main followers Tommy and Carol, a joined-at-the-hip kind of couple, plus a few other kids.

One girl, Alice thinks he name might be Stacy or something, seems to be kissing up a little too much. Like she thinks getting on Alice's good side might get her brownie points. And she must think Alice is too

stupid to figure it out, but she's *not*, so she plays along to see how far the girl will go. She can tell that it's already pretty hard for the poor girl to be nice, which makes the whole ordeal kind of entertaining.

Then there's another girl who seems to genuinely want to be her friend. Or more, if the familiar look in her eye is enough to go on. And y'know what, she wouldn't mind getting in a little 'Girl Time' with her. Amanda (or *Amy*, or maybe it's *Abby*?). Alice wonders if she should ask for her name again, but also thinks doing so will make her look like a bit of a bitch for forgetting her name so quickly. Either way, she slides an arm around the girl's tiny shoulders and plasters on a sexy smile.

And there's a guy, the only extra guy in the bunch, who keeps glancing at her boobs and then up at her face to try and make it look like he wasn't ogling her chest. She doesn't like him much, but he's quiet which she can appreciate, much like how he's appreciating her curves. And when she slips her arm around the Amanda/Amy/Abby girl's shoulders, he looks between the two of them in what she guesses he thinks is a subtle way, with eyes that scream *please make-out in front of me*.

(Because for some reason girls dating other girls is gross and wrong, but if they just make-out with each other it's completely fine. She will never *ever* understand that logic.)

But yeah.

Instant Celebrity.

"Billy Hargrove's friend from Cali."

"The rocker chick glued to Hargrove's hip."

"The tomboy with the nice ass."

Those were just the *nice* comments she caught people whispering to each other in the hallway. There were also some pretty rude things whispered between friends, but she's good at ignoring that shit. Always has been.

And none of that is nearly as bad as the redhead loudly chewing gum

next to her as they wait out the five minute break between classes. It's grating so hard on her nerves that Alice thinks she might have to punch the bitch just to shut her up.

"So, like, what's with the flannel?" The gum-smacker, named Carol, asks.

She glares at the redhead. "You got a problem with my wardrobe?"

"It's a little too *manly*, don't ya think?"

"It's also *comfy* and the only clean thing I could find this morning, so fuck off."

"I think it looks *great* on you." Amanda/Amy/Abby says with a smile.

Alice pulls her in by her shoulders and gives her a loud smooch on the cheek for that. Gets a giggle and some light blushing in return.

"So, Princess Nancy and her two Boy Toys are your new buddies?" Tommy asks with a smirk. "Sounds like *fun*."

"That a problem too? 'Cause I like 'em." She shrugs at the end, and that stupid smirk drops just a bit.

Billy drops a hand on her shoulder, then. She looks over at him with a scowl and he smirks now, knowing just how annoyed she already is by these assholes.

And then the asshole laughs.

"Chill. Nobody's got ya on a fuckin' leash. Do whatever."

"Oh, can I do *whoever* too? That's cool, right? Yes? *Wicked*."

That's when she spots the usual trio, just as Nancy and Jonathan are leaving Steve by himself in the hall. She grins as he slumps against some lockers, but after a second she notices the haggard look on his face. Byers and Wheeler together seems to drain him pretty bad emotionally, or at least that's what Alice thinks from what little she's seen of them all together.

"And with *that*, I'll catch ya later."

She rushes away before anyone can say anything.

Steve looks freaked the fuck out when she grabs him by the arm and tells him to 'play along'. She can feel someone staring at her back as she walks away with him.

(Later, she'll realize it was Billy. In this town it's normally Billy who stares hard enough for her to feel it, like a hot piece of metal is pressed against her shoulder blades.)

They find a bench outside under some sunlight that finally decided to show through the clouds. Alice leans back like a sunbathing cat, stretching her arms high above her head and arching her back. It's a show, maybe a little flirty if she's being honest, and apparently it works in some way because when she turns to look at Steve, who's decided he'd rather stand there like an awkward dork than sit down, he suddenly turns to look at something on his left.

Alice chuckles up at the sky.

"So..." Steve starts. He looks uncomfortable as all Hell and kinda shy with his hunched shoulders and wandering gaze. He can't seem to focus on one thing for more than a few seconds as he rocks back on his heels. "How do you like Hawkins so far?"

"Small and oh-so utterly *normal* towns ain't really my *sh*tick*. I'm bored outta my freakin' skull, to be honest."

"It's not *that* bad."

"I'm just used to bigger towns." She explains with a shrug. "Grew up in 'em and all, y'know?"

Steve nods, the only answer Alice figures she's going to get. Then there's a round of silence, about two minutes in total, before he apparently feels the need to speak again. Alice thanks all the Gods for that. She hates sitting in the quiet for so long.

"What made you bolt?"

"What?"

"I saw you, earlier, hanging out with Billy and his circle. Just before you hauled me away. Why'd you leave?"

She ends up ranting, going on about how Carol thinks she can hide insults in her questions, making fun of her flannel and shit in a round-a-bout way. How Tommy's face all on it's own is annoying enough to make her want to walk away. How the other guy, she can't be fucked to remember his name, was too busy staring at her chest to say *anything*, but she's pretty sure *nothing* he says will ever be intelligent enough to make her like him even a little bit. And about how one of the two other girls being a kiss-ass, to get closer to Billy probably, was slowly but surely pissing her off.

"But Anna was nice like usual?"

Oh, her name was Anna? She thinks, *Whoops...*

"Yeah. Her and Billy are the only ones in that group I can fuckin' handle."

"While we're on the subject of Blonde Assholes," Steve gives her a little smirk that she give right back because *Hell yeah, Billy can be a royal asshole sometimes*. "How'd that happen?"

"Hmm?"

"You, Hargrove, friends. How and why?"

Alice doesn't think *"I exorcised a demon outta him when were thirteen, and then we bonded over shitty parents"* would be very believable. That, and she's pretty sure Billy doesn't want her to go around spouting his secrets to people he doesn't like.

"Ma got a job in Cali a couple years ago. I needed some air after we had a screaming match." *And here comes the lie...* "We met at one of the piers, in the dark. Like a couple of creeps."

"You spend *one* night together, the same night you *met*, and then, *what*, you're suddenly *best friends for life*?"

No. We were impulsive brats who'd had fights with our parents, so we ran away for a week. Together. She thinks.

But that's probably too much to share with a stranger.

"I mean, I guess so?"

She doesn't sound very confident in her answer. Not even to herself.

Steve shakes his head slowly, looking a lot like a disappointed mom. It look nothing *her* mom when she's 'disappointed'. "Yeah, sure, 'cause that's *totally* reasonable."

"It is when you've spent four weeks trapped in a Pinto with your alcoholic mother. Especially when she likes bringing guys back to the motel because she conveniently *'forgets'*-" She adds the air quotes and everything, even though her mom absolutely *did* forget she was there every single time. "-she has a preteen daughter waiting for her there."

He gives her a sympathetic look and then asks, "What made it reasonable for Billy?"

"Now now, *Stevie*. Don't go thinkin' I'll give you dirt on my *best friend* that easily."

"What do I have to do for it?" He asks, his tone one part sarcastic and another part teasing.

She leans in slowly until her lips are almost right against his ear and whispers to him, using her well-practiced tone for tricking idiots in bars out of their money, "At least buy me dinner first."

He uses his own perfected flirty tone when he replies, "Is that a promise?"

In a flash she's sitting back, far away, and smiling at him. "No. Not now. Not when I know that's *all* you want from me, anyway."

"But if I didn't give a shit about possible blackmail material?" He asks. "If I genuinely wanted to ask you out?"

"I'd say *'take me to the best diner in town'* then." She pauses for a

second, frowns, and adds, "And the next day Billy'd be all up in your face."

"Jealous?"

"Hardly. We just look out for each other. And he *hates* you, so he'd probably pull the Big Brother Act."

"Surprising, considering how he treats his step-sister."

"Well, he's *stuck* with *her*, but he can throw *me* away whenever he wants. I think that's why he acts that way."

Another lie. She doesn't actually know why he hates Max besides the hint in that comment about her being a "*tattlin' bitch*" during the ride home yesterday. What *exactly* Max ratted him out for, Alice doesn't know. What she *does* know is that they sorta got along in the early days, and then they didn't, so it was probably something *big*.

She asks Steve what happened to his face just to switch topics, gently poking one of the faint bruises on his cheek to annoy him.

He lazily swats her hand away with a little smile. "A fight."

He doesn't have to add *with Billy*. She already figured that part out and he knows it.

"Why'd you n' him duke it out?"

She mimes a boxer's stance and punches the air. Steve chuckles a little because she looks like a complete dork when she does it.

"I was in a bad mood and he was making it worse, so I hit him and he hit back." He says with a shrug, "He's stronger, though, so I look worse."

Guess my lessons actually sunk in, she thinks.

The bell goes, then. Steve offers to walk her to class, but she declines and tells him she feels like skipping her Math class today. Just wants to sit outside and watch the gloomy sky for a while. Steve seems to understand at least a little bit. He smiles and waves goodbye as he

walks backwards towards the closest door.

"You should learn to, like, *not* be a *cock* to people, y'know that?"

Billy snorts.

"No, I'm serious. You can't just go around being a dick to whoever you feel like."

"This about Harrington's face? 'Cause he hit me first."

"Yes, I know. But *you* gotta know that you're stronger than him, and that you might do some permanent damage one o' these days.."

"Is this you being a White Knight, defending the Princess' honor?"

"No. This is me being *me* telling *you* not to give in to your rage-y impulses."

"I'm *not*."

"You *are*." Billy looks at her and notices the serious expression she's got. It's a look that says what she's saying is *life or death* and that he *needs to listen* so he doesn't start, like, the *apocalypse* or something. "Ya wanna know where it comes from?"

"I got a couple ideas."

"And one or two of those might be adding on, but it's one main thing that's got you all fired up."

He raises an eyebrow.

"It's the Demon." She whispers, leaning in real close. "It left a dark spot on your soul, and that dark spot turned into something that amps up any violent thoughts you already have. It puts you on autopilot until you beat *someone* or *something* into submission."

He narrows his eyes at her and says, "What *exactly* did Harrington tell you."

"That you fought." She pouts at him, but like a little kid who wants something. Lips pursed and cheeks puffed a little. "Why? Is there more to it?"

"No. It's fine."

Just before Practice at the end of the day, Billy corners Steve. Pulls him into the closest bathroom and locks the door behind them before he slams the slightly taller teen against the wall.

"What kinda bullshit have you been feeding her, Harrington?"

The other boy flinches at the word *bullshit*. Billy won't wonder why until later tonight, but he notices now and grins at him for it.

"Who are we talking about here?"

Billy shoves him against the wall again, harder this time, and growls, "You know who."

Steve sighs. "I didn't tell Alice about *The Incident*, if that's what you mean."

"What *did* you tell her?"

"About our *last* fight."

"Well, she's gotta know *something* about *The Incident*," He mocks, "Asking about shit the way she did."

"I didn't tell her *anything*." He spits back, "Maybe she can just, I don't know, *tell* that you're a *fuckin' psycho*."

Billy drops him then, a little thrown off by the word *psycho*.

(He hasn't been called that in a while, and to suddenly hear it from Harrington is a little... well, not *surprising* but maybe *shocking*? Like, he's heard the Merry Band of Geeks call him that, and Max uses it most days to describe him, but it's always a little fucked up to hear it from people his age and up.)

Harrington seems a little shocked too, but Billy thinks it's more because he actually let the creep go so easily after that than anything else.

"Fuck off, *Princess*."

He stands there for a minute and just stares, then swallows loudly and says, "Coach'll kill you if you skip practice."

"I said *fuck off*!"

Harrington leaves, and a few minutes later so does Billy.

Instead of going to practice he heads outside and gets in his car, knowing full well he'll have to wait an hour before Max gets out of her little nerd club and they can go home. He decides to smoke for a while and wait it out.

As long as he doesn't put himself anywhere with someone he can smack for the next sixty minutes, it doesn't really matter.

Alice patrols the woods for the first time since they got to Hawkins that night, and finds nothing.

But she hears things.

Things that make her nervous.